

DEMOCRACYWATCH
Project: Promote the Rights of Domestic Workers
Orientation Meeting with Employers of Domestic Workers

April 12, 2010

Venue: Democracywatch Auditorium

Democracywatch with the support of ILO is implementing the project called “Promoting the Rights of Domestic Workers”. The objective of the project is to collect the



employer’s views regarding roles and responsibilities of their domestic workers and their rights mentioned in the code of conduct and raise awareness to protect domestic workers rights. With a mission of promoting the rights of domestic workers, Democracywatch is having dialogue with both the domestic workers and their employers. On progression, Democracywatch arranged a sharing meeting on 12th April, 2010 at 3.00pm at Democracywatch Auditorium with 23 selected employers (participants

list enclosed) of domestic workers residing in Ramna P.S. area. They are one of the most important stakeholders regarding upholding the rights of domestic workers. Employer’s personal as well as communal perception towards domestic workers needs to be taken into account to ensure a safe and sound working environment for domestic workers.

In her welcome speech, Ms. Taleya Rehman, the Executive Director of Democracywatch, expressed her gratitude to the participants for sparing their busy and valuable time to attend the meeting. She said that domestic workers necessity and importance at home is felt when they are absent. We, especially the career women could work outside home freely and without much worry because of their service at home. The present labor law does not include rights of domestic workers. Government and civil society is working together to incorporate rights of domestic workers in the labor law. In this respect a code of conduct on rights of the domestic workers has been prepared. She explained the necessity of awareness about the draft code of conduct prepared by development organizations. The opinion and attitude of employers is essential before finalization and promulgation of the rule as a legal framework.

Ms. Mansura Akhter, Project Coordinator of Democracywatch, presented the draft code of conduct regarding the safeguard and welfare of domestic workers using multimedia. The presentation was highlighted on the quantitative as well as qualitative scenario of currently employed domestic workforce in Bangladesh. Ms. Mansura Akhter also refreshed all about our constitutional obligation to promote and establish the rights



of domestic workers. She especially drew attention on the points related to registration, working condition and security, protected working environment, ensuring reasonable working time and wage, guarantee of welfare, settlement of disputes and maintenance of working relation among domestic workers and their employers. The presentation was pointed out the additional issues for welfare of domestic workers like their capacity building, training, leave and leisure, maternal leave, medical facilities, compensation due to accident, supervision by legal authority, and so forth. The duties and responsibilities of domestic workers were also mentioned in the presentation. Her discussion included a sincere consideration of Child Act, 1974, that no child below 14 years shall be recruited as domestic workers subject to given exceptions.

There was an open forum for discussion and all the participants were encouraged to take part in the discussion. The participants present freely expressed their opinion on code of conduct presented.

Ms. Farida Hossain, one of the participants, expressed her views in the form of humanistic approach. She said that treating domestic workers as human being with human dignity could resolve the problems of domestic workers. However, she disagreed to the notion of four hour leisure time in day time. In her opinion one hour is sufficient during day time.



Ms. Mahfuza Begum, another participant, emphasized on mutual respect and sharing responsibility of both domestic workers and their employers. We should be conscious about the fact that most of the domestic workers were poor being deprived from many rights. It was our opportunity to promote their rights for improving the overall system.

Mr. Shamim said that law alone could not ensure the rights of domestic workers but it required changing affirmative mind-set of the employers towards domestic workers.

Ms. Farhana Hafiz noticed that we should take into consideration the age factor of domestic workers. Specially, the physical and psychological changes and responses of adolescents, teenagers and aged domestic workers need to be taken care.

Ms. Fahima Sultana sketched possibility and risk of sexual and consequent physical harassment of female domestic workers.

Ms. Masuda Pervin underlined the necessity of joint action through networking among organizations working to meet the stated goals.

There were other opinions from the participants in the programs. The views expressed that there were many employers already complied with the rules. But there were also employers who did not bother to consider the minimal rights of domestic workers. In response against the increasing incidents of victimization, a legal platform and safeguard

could ensure the promotion and protection of domestic workers. There were other issues too which need to be thought about. Since domestic workers were working in home, they might be treated as a family member. Domestic workers should have right to express their views. Many of the disputes could be settled through mutual understanding of each other. Patience and words of encouragement could enhance efficiency of domestic workers. Socialization of family members of the employers should incorporate sensitization for behaving well with domestic workers.

Ms. Tahrunnesa Abdullah paid precise attention to form an association of the domestic workers under the supervision of the government and NGOs where all the domestic workers would be required to be registered as members. That association will be liable to mitigate any anomalies in the action of both domestic workers and their employers. Even the employers could also complain to the association for misbehavior, if any, caused by the domestic workers. There may be a structured system of their work schedule within the family. The mentality of controlling domestic workers rather than cooperating and understanding would not bring efficiency. These rights should also be considered for domestic workers working abroad.



Ms. Latifa Akand, the Chairperson of Democracywatch and also Chair of the program appreciated the participants for their spontaneous participation and for providing valuable opinions. She stressed the need to consider the job of domestic workers as a profession and establishment of a formalized structure for domestic workers. Age factor of domestic workers should be highly considered to ensure non-commission of child labor. No domestic workers would be refrained from their rights of having primary education. Emotional as well as recreational factors should be considered carefully. Safe and protected work environment could only be ensured by awareness and sensitization of the employers.



Ms. Tahrunnesa Abdullah, project director of Democracywatch, thanked all the participants at the end of the meeting for their sincere concern about the issue of domestic workers. She hoped for continuous support and cooperation from them in promoting the rights of domestic workers.